The Hix Brothers Dairy

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Making the feed supply is a top priority on the century-old farm. High forage yields are evidence of years of soil testing, proper soil fertilization and liming practices. Nearly 30 acres of alfalfa, 80 acres of small grain, 110 acres of corn and 50 acres of orchardgrass-clover hay has grown and harvested.

The Hixes have successfully used artificial insemination for more than 25 years to improve herd performance. Both John and his 23-year-old son, Tom, are trained in the technique.

A functional, well-maintained set of buildings and farm machinery are used to carry out everyday chores. "Although we have seven tractors, most of our equipment is older and smaller than what you'll find on most daily farms," stated 51-year-old William. "That's probably one reason we've been able to stay in business."

The conservation-minded brothers have installed several sod waterways on their land, regularly use strip cropping to discourage washing away of rich topsoil and are strong advocates of no-till corn planting.

With the help of the Soil Conservation Service, John and William recently constructed a unique watering system for their cattle. By using underground drainage, a strong water supply has been developed for livestock drinking water and for washing the milk parlor floor down.

In their "spare" time, William and his son, 24-year-old Danny, and John and his three sons (David, age 25, Tom, age 23, and Jim, age 17) cut tobacco for local farmers and harvest timber from their land.

With approximately 600 forested acres, the Hixes can sell pine for pulpwood and hardwood for logs. "In the future, we would like to make better use of our timberland and do some reforesting," John noted.

Both John and William are active in farm organizations. William has served on the county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) committee for several years and is active in community and church acitivites.

John is a past director of the Old Dominion division of Dairyment Incorporated and has served as both president and vice president of the Appomattox County Farm Bureau. He is the current president of the Appomattox Dairymen's Association and chairman of the 1982 Vrginia Farm Management Tour set for July 17 in Appomattox County.

The Hix farm was one of six chosen to be featured on this year's farm tour. The Grade-A dairy will be open for visitors from 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., Saturday, July 17. Serving as hostesses on tour day will be the remaining members of the Hix family: William's daughters, Jane, Cynthia and Mary Beth and daughter-in-law, Brenda, and John's daughter, Janet, and daughter-in-law, Roxie.

The country store will reopen its doors for the occasion and house native crafts and educational demonstrations. Sponsored by the Appomattox Extension Homemakers Club, the store will include demonstrations of quilling, chair seat weaving, stained glass, beekeeping exhibits and quilting. Several items will be offered for sale.

Don't miss your chance to visit the historic Grade-A dairy. For more information, contact your local Extension office.

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Torrence farm uses solar energy

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when cattle are fed on an automatic feed bunk."

The easy-going farmer has found he must be constantly aware of keeping production costs below income. "Everything we buy has gone up," he noted. "The milk check is probably triple what it was four years ago, but the total profit isn't any more than it was then."

To help combat inflation, Dennis buys used equipment and keeps it in top-notch condition. The up-to-date dairyman explained the rationale behind this practice by citing a recent study. "It's been shown that those who make the most profit in dairying own the least amount of equipment," he said. "We have the bare minimum."

Nevertheless, the work gets done on the Torrence Farm. In addition to caring for the milk herd, Dennis uses the home farm and 128 rented acres to raise 50 acres of corn, 25 acres of alfalfa and 45 acres of oats and grass hay. Approximately 142 acres of pasture land and 136 forested acres round out this farming operation.

Although a dairy can be totally confining, the Torrence family finds time for recreation and relaxation thanks to Dennis' father, Elliott, and two hired hands who regularly perform milking chores every other weekend and when needed during the week.

Depending upon the season, Dennis, Pat, and 11-year-old Zane may be found snow skiing, traveling, fishing in the one-acre farm pond, or hunting with their beagles on the farm. A favorite pastime for Dennis and Pat is weekly square-dancing with the Appomattox Grand Squares. Zane enjoys showing cattle and has inspirations of studying veterinary medicine.

Because of the farm's close proximity to town, the Torrences host a number of half-day tours for school groups and handicapped persons each year.

Pat, a primary school principal, said, "It's a real joy and learning experience for some of the small children and handicapped to actually visit a dairy and see a cow close up. We love opening our farm to them."

The farm is also used by high school Future Farmer groups as a "laboratory" whenever needed.

The Torrence Farm will be a laboratory for its biggest group yet when it plays host to the sixth annual Virginia Farm Management Tour, Saturday, July 17.

The farm will be one of the six highly-efficient, well-managed farm operations open to the public from 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

The tour will be sponsored by the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service in cooperation with Appomattox County agricultural leaders.

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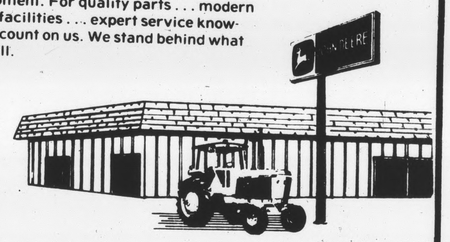

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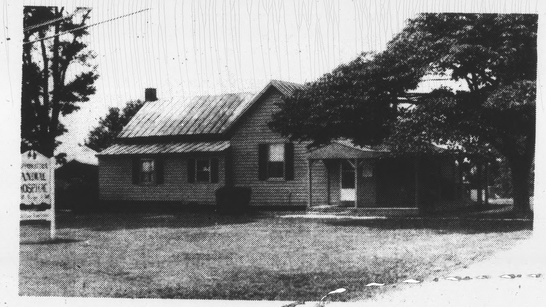

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